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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003233

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MEETING WITH THE GOVERNMENT
OF IRAQ PRIME MINISTER NURI AL-MALIKI ON DECEMBER 11

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3183

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3193

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Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a December 11 meeting with Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad, Secretary of Defense Gates (SecDef) expressed his condolences for the December 8 bombings and reassured Maliki that the United States was willing to assist in any way possible. SecDef explained the importance of cooperation between the security ministries in preventing future attacks and warned that Iraqi leaders should not be compl\9wFQ&,fuQQQ>gcIQQ%=9Qof some "security violations" that are hard to control. SecDef reiterated his point from the Presidency Council meetings (ref B) that the attacks should serve as a reminder that the terrorist threat to Iraq still exists and expressed his condolences for the resulting loss of life. He praised Maliki for GoI restraint in not rushing to publicly assign blame in the wake of the attacks, reminding him that the goal of al Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) is to prompt an overreaction and instigate unrest. Maliki agreed, stating that AQI's desire to renew sectarian tensions poses a great danger to Iraq. According to him, this danger is intensified by the desire of neighboring countries for the return of sectarianism to Iraq. The terrorists, he said, are intensifying their efforts to disrupt the March elections. Qintensifying their efforts to disrupt the March elections. Maliki claimed that the GoI has information that the terrorists see this period as their "last chance," and he thought their efforts would decrease after the elections. (Comment: Maliki did not explain why he thought so, and there is no evidence to suggest that attempted al Qa'ida attacks would necessarily decrease after the elections. End comment.)

[1](#)5. (C) In an attempt to sound reassuring, and as if to prove his earlier point that Iraq is a strong state, Maliki informed SecDef of the detention of an individual who confessed to "everything" regarding the December 8 attacks. The planner of the attacks, Maliki stated matter-of-factly, was linked to Syria and as a result he said the GoI must "find out" what Syria's role is. However, in line with his recent de-escalation of rhetoric against the Syrian state, he clarified that it was individuals living in Syria, not the Syrian government, he was blaming. Also consistent with his recent public statements, Maliki insisted that it was clear from recent confessions that there is no difference between Al Qaeda and Ba'athists

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IRAQ SECURITY FORCES: MODERNIZATION AND PRIORITIZATION

¶16. (C) SecDef asked Maliki if there has been any change in priorities for the ISF given the recent spate of attacks and whether the security forces were doing enough to coordinate their efforts. Maliki responded that the ISF are already working together well and should focus on continuing to do so. Maliki asserted AQI is no longer capable of controlling territory, and instead resorts to periodic spectacular attacks. According to Maliki, the GoI must focus on intelligence to counter this threat. Echoing a statement made by his Minister of Defense to SecDef the previous day, Maliki admitted weakness in GoI intelligence capabilities, saying that although their capabilities have improved, they were still not at a "desirable" level. Maliki praised the joint U.S.-Iraqi intelligence operations to disrupt terrorist networks, but complained that there were so many terrorists and Ba'athists in Iraq that every time they eliminated one another would pop up. However, he told SecDef that these groups do not pose a great threat, cannot reconstitute, and that he would exert greater effort to completely dismantle them. SecDef assured Maliki that the U.S. would sustain the joint intelligence-driven operations against AQI and other extremists.

¶17. (C) Shifting to the ISF's needs over the next two years, SecDef told Maliki that the U.S. intends to turn over hundreds of millions of dollars worth of equipment to Iraq and that Congress would have to approve further assistance. However, SecDef warned that asking for more equipment or assistance for Iraq would be difficult because of the President's increasing commitment in Afghanistan. SecDef emphasized that two things would help make the case to Congress for additional assistance: (1) A significant GoI contribution to acquire needed equipment; and (2) demonstrating continued commitment to national unity and avoiding violence, including against the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MeK) at Ashraf. Maliki thanked SecDef for his efforts and explained that he had spoken to MNF-I Commanding General Odierno about equipment issues. He reassured SecDef that the GoI was making progress on every issue cited as a congressional concern, although he did not specifically elaborate on the MeK. Maliki also said that Iraq is willing to pay a reasonable price for old weapons, and that they had already signed contracts for equipment.

¶18. (C) Turning his attention to Iraq's need for fighter aircraft, Maliki expressed hope for U.S. assistance in acquiring F-16s. SecDef explained that he had received the completed Air Sovereignty Assessment from General Odierno and would be letting the GoI know of the proposed way ahead in the near future. Finally, Maliki spoke about a contract the GoI had signed with the Government of France for 12 Mirage planes before the 2003 war for which had it had paid 657 million Euros, but never received the aircraft. He said they were working the situation out and were not sure whether they would eventually receive the money or the planes.

¶19. (C) SecDef reiterated that Iraqi officials should prioritize their needs between now and 2012 when the U.S. would complete its drawdown. Maliki said that he had Qwould complete its drawdown. Maliki said that he had discussed this with former MNSTC-I Commander Lieutenant General Helmick, and they had established a list of priorities, which includes boats to protect oil platforms, helicopters, and planes.

NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND GOVERNMENT FORMATION

¶10. (C) SecDef congratulated Maliki on the passage of an election law and underscored the importance of his leadership in the coming months. SecDef reminded Maliki of the vulnerabilities of waiting too long to form a government, and warned against a repeat of the power vacuum following the

2005 national elections. When asked how long he thought the government formation process would last, Maliki said it depends on the results of the elections. The important thing, he said, is that everyone must be included in the new government. Maliki stated that even if a party gains 50 percent of parliamentary seats, they must include others in the government, although not based on a quota system.

KIRKUK, ARTICLE 140, AND ARAB-KURD RELATIONS

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¶11. (C) SecDef told Maliki that he was going to Kirkuk to visit U.S troops and would then fly to Irbil to meet with President Barzani, where he said he would encourage the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President to promote compromise (reported septel). When SecDef asked about progress with UNAMI's high level task force (HLTF), Maliki said that he proposed a joint security architecture in the north to General Odierno, which would include U.S. cooperation with Iraq and Peshmerga security forces in Ninewa, so that the upcoming elections could proceed smoothly. This will ensure enough calm that the parties can move to the next stage: using the constitution, a census, and a referendum in the disputed areas.

¶12. (C) Maliki stated that Kirkuk complicates everything and a resolution will require more time and effort. The solution must be inclusive, he said, and must have the support of the local population, otherwise it would not be sustainable. Regarding Article 140, Maliki stated that it had been used to resolve certain issues, but that it cannot solve the most basic question: Should Kirkuk be a part of Iraq or Kurdistan? Article 140 is not feasible in many regards, in Maliki's opinion, because it ties Kirkuk to other disputed areas such as Sinjar and Khanaqin. Maliki stated that they are using the UNAMI HLTF process as a basis for further progress, with Rowsh Shaways representing the Kurdish side and Sadiq Rikabi representing the Arabs. He stated that having former Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih in Irbil as the KRG's Prime Minister will help. After being prompted by Rikabi, Maliki said that the issue of Kirkuk is complicated by greater tensions in Iraq and that after the elections things may become more stable (implying that not much progress will be made on Kirkuk before the March elections). In the meantime, he said, they would continue with UNAMI's efforts and the implementation of the joint security architecture, with U.S forces present to ensure no negative incidents occur. When asked by SecDef whether tensions within the KRG have affected the KRG-GoI relationship, Maliki said they had not. Finally, Maliki thanked SecDef specifically for everything he has done to support Iraq and told him that GoI relations with the KRG are now much better than before. The one exception he mentioned was the relationship between Mosul and the KRG, which he said has been plagued by historic animosity.

¶13. (U) DASD Kahl reviewed and approved this cable.
HILL